

EARLY CHILDHOOD AND AFTERSCHOOL STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Final Report and Recommendations



MISSOURI EARLY CHILDHOOD AND AFTERSCHOOL STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT STEERING COMMITTEE

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Michael L. Parson

GOVERNOR
STATE OF MISSOURI

August 19, 2021

Greetings from the Governor's Office,

Even before the creation of the Missouri Office of Childhood in January 2021, stakeholders played a critical role in informing the Office's creation and identifying opportunities where the state could improve early childhood programs and services. We are committed to working alongside providers, advocates, and community organizations to better serve Missouri children and families.

While members of the General Assembly and I were elected to make the ultimate decisions for many of the programs and services the state provides, we cannot fulfil our duties without meaningful input from those in the community who are impacted by the decisions we make.

Under the newly created Office of Childhood, we will have one shared vision: to ensure Missouri's children are safe, healthy, and successful learners. This foundational work involves more than the state. In order for this new vision to be successful, we must collaborate, consistently communicate, and work together with our community partners.

The creation of the Office of Childhood has provided numerous opportunities to reassess how we do business as a state. One of those opportunities is re-examining how we engage and collaborate with early childhood stakeholders. We are grateful to the Missouri Early Childhood and Afterschool Stakeholder Engagement Steering Committee and the Hunt Institute for their hard work and thoughtfulness in developing this report and recommendations.

We look forward to the positive impact the Office of Childhood and early childhood stakeholders are sure to have when they work together to improve the lives of Missouri's children and families.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature of Michael L. Parson in blue ink. The signature is stylized, with the first name "Michael" and last name "Parson" clearly visible.

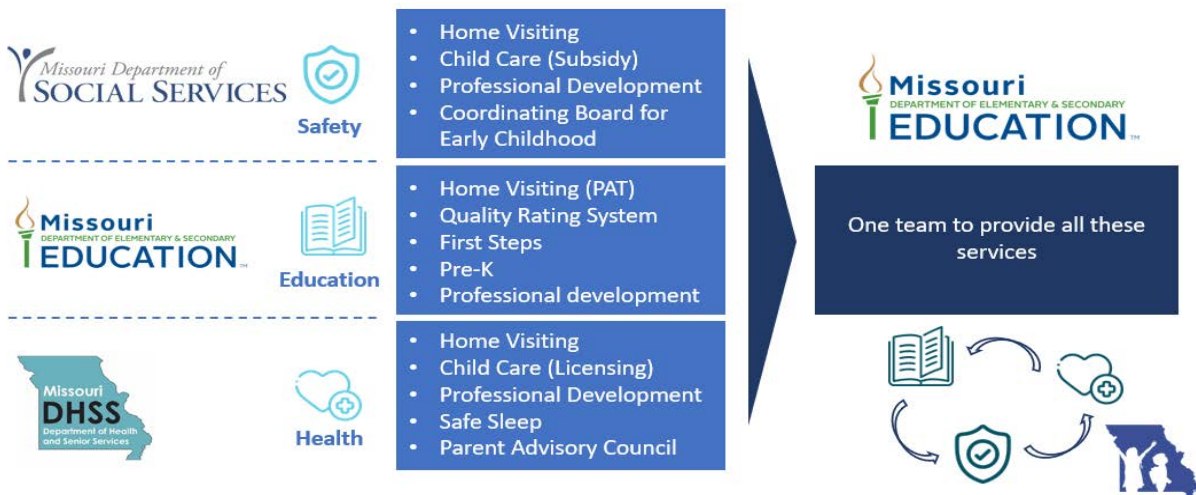
Michael L. Parson
Governor

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On January 28, 2021, Governor Parson, alongside leaders from the Departments of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), Health and Senior Services (DHSS), and Social Services (DSS) announced the consolidation of Missouri's key interagency early childhood programs into a single Office of Childhood. This consolidation integrates early learning, afterschool, home visiting, and child care into one office, based in DESE, with one **shared vision**: Missouri's children are **safe, healthy, successful learners**. With the creation of one single Office of Childhood, coordination and collaboration will be improved to maximize the effectiveness and quality of the available programs with the goal to make services easier to access and navigate for families.

Coordination and collaboration around early care and education systems has been a key challenge for states. Fragmentation, inefficiency, and lack of coordination in the administration of early childhood programs creates real obstacles to access, and results in many children missing out on the supports they need to thrive. In Missouri, three agencies have administered five federal programs and state Pre-K, including some of the same services. This structure forced families to apply to multiple programs, housed across multiple agencies, often with duplicative paperwork requirements and inconsistent eligibility criteria. Integration and alignment across programs will make accessing these programs easier for families.



PROGRAMS IN THE OFFICE OF CHILDHOOD

- Afterschool Programs (21st Century Community Learning Centers and School Age Community)
- Child Care Block Grant
- Child Care Licensing
- Child Care Resource and Referral
- Child Care Subsidy
- Child Development Associate Scholarship
- DSS Early Head Start
- Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems
- Educare First Steps Early Intervention
- Home Visiting Programs
- Infant and Toddler Specialist Network
- ParentLink
- Parents as Teachers
- Quality Assurance Report Pilot
- Safe Sleep and Safe Cribs
- State-and Federally-funded Preschool
- Trauma Start

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Across the late spring and early summer of 2021, Office of Childhood leaders, the Office of Governor Mike Parson, Kids Win Missouri, The Children's Trust Fund, the Zero to Three Task Force, and The Hunt Institute came together to **develop recommendations for ongoing engagement with the Office of Childhood in an effort to ensure the needs of the state's early and after care and education stakeholders are incorporated meaningfully within its decision-making processes.** To achieve this goal, partners brought together the **Missouri Stakeholder Engagement Steering Committee** to unite all early childhood and afterschool stakeholders in a single, cohesive engagement planning process to provide the Office of Childhood with comprehensive feedback to gather recommendations for the future Stakeholder Engagement Process.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Stakeholder engagement **is the process by which an organization involves people who are affected by the decisions it makes or by its implementation to achieve accepted outcomes.** Stakeholder engagement ranges from **informing** through reports, emails, or newsletters to **two-way participation** through surveys, focus groups, public meetings, and advisory councils. Through this process, the Office of Childhood will use the recommendations to create processes to **ensure there is regular, ongoing, and meaningful engagement with reciprocal communication across diverse groups of stakeholders.**

The Importance of Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement

Organizations should no longer choose if they want to engage with stakeholders, but how to successfully engage. Those affected by the achievements of the Office of Childhood should be given the opportunity to comment and provide input into the development of decisions that affect them. Meaningful engagement occurs when organizations choose to establish relationships with stakeholders to manage the impact of those changes. Stakeholder engagement enhances accountability, efficiency in decision-making, and governance. Engaging stakeholders improves information flow and policy and program results by tapping into local knowledge and testing policy changes with stakeholders. According to the Administration for Children and Families, [Early Childhood Systems Building Resource Guide](#), ***"providing opportunities for input from a diverse group of stakeholders is essential to sound design and implementation of the early childhood system and to carrying out the state's leadership role in the work."*** Stakeholders contribute as experts in their field, have their issues heard, and contribute to the decision-making process resulting in partners more likely to collaborate to build a system of supports that responds to the needs of young children and families.

Benefits of Stakeholder Engagement

- ▶ Creates higher quality decision-making.
- ▶ Builds consensus increasing commitment for policy implementation.
- ▶ Avoids duplication of policies, procedures, standards, and regulations.
- ▶ Increases efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery.
- ▶ Improves processes for systems building and policy development by leveraging stakeholder expertise and perspective.
- ▶ Encourages greater sensitivity to policy and delivery design meeting community needs and ensures achievement of objectives.
- ▶ Enhances community confidence in policies.
- ▶ Increases accountability.

Missouri Early Childhood and Afterschool Stakeholder Engagement Process

The Steering Committee was comprised by leaders from state agencies, early childhood and afterschool programs, partner organizations, advocacy organizations, and philanthropy- all tasked with designing a comprehensive stakeholder engagement process. From May through August of 2021, the Steering Committee met to develop a process and recommendations for stakeholder engagement.

- **Steering Committee convening:** The steering committee met to establish questions for the focus groups to gain feedback on what effective stakeholder engagement for the Office of Childhood should look like. The committee also established potential participants for the focus groups.
- **Focus Groups:** A total of 10 focus groups were conducted in which approximately 275 people participated. Participants included early childhood and afterschool professionals, state leaders and policymakers, higher education faculty and staff, social services providers, health services providers, business leaders, organizational partners and advocates, members of the Child Care Advisory Group, and members of the Parent Advisory Council.
- **Steering Committee convening:** The steering committee met to review results from the focus group and to plan the online survey to elicit feedback on effective stakeholder engagement practices.
- **Online survey:** Focus group participants and other individuals associated with the Office of Childhood received the short, online survey. Almost 600 responses were recorded.
- **Steering Committee convening:** The steering committee met to review results from the online survey and to provide feedback on the final report.

Steering Committee Convening



Focus Groups



Steering Committee Convening



Online Survey

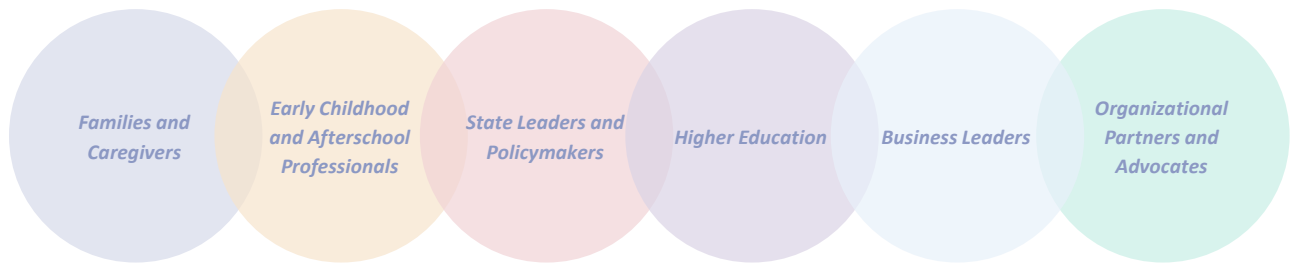


Steering Committee Convening

Throughout the document, the term “professional(s)” is used to describe any person working directly with children and families or for an organization providing services for children and families.

MISSOURI STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT FOCUS GROUPS AND SURVEY DATA

To develop recommendations for stakeholder engagement as the Office of Childhood is created, virtual focus groups were held across several weeks in June of 2021. Based on the focus group information, and with Steering Committee feedback, an online survey was created to gather input from professionals and families that were not able to participate in focus groups.



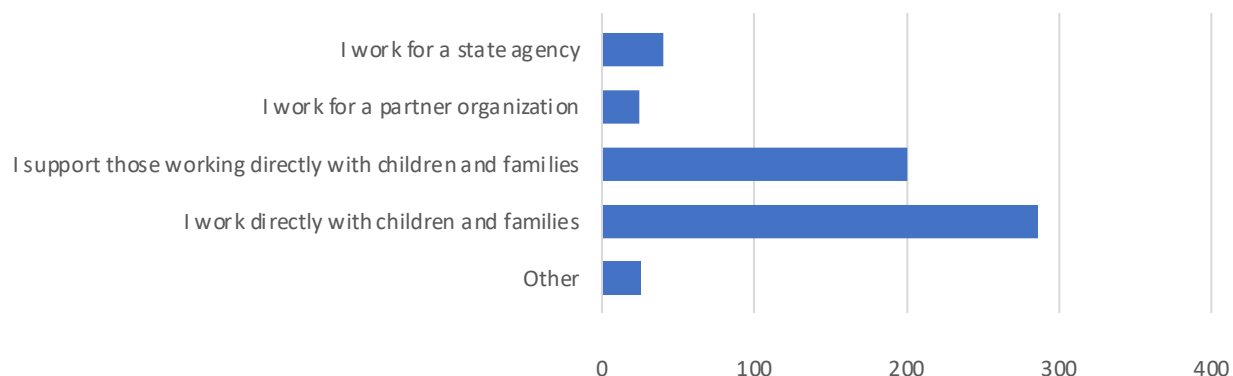
Focus Groups

A total of 10 focus groups were conducted in which approximately 275 early childhood and afterschool professionals, state leaders and policymakers, higher education faculty and staff, social services providers, health services providers, business leaders, organizational partners and advocates, members of the Child Care Advisory Group, and members of the Parent Advisory Council participated. Families and professionals working directly with children and families were difficult to reach through the focus groups which is discussed further throughout the report.

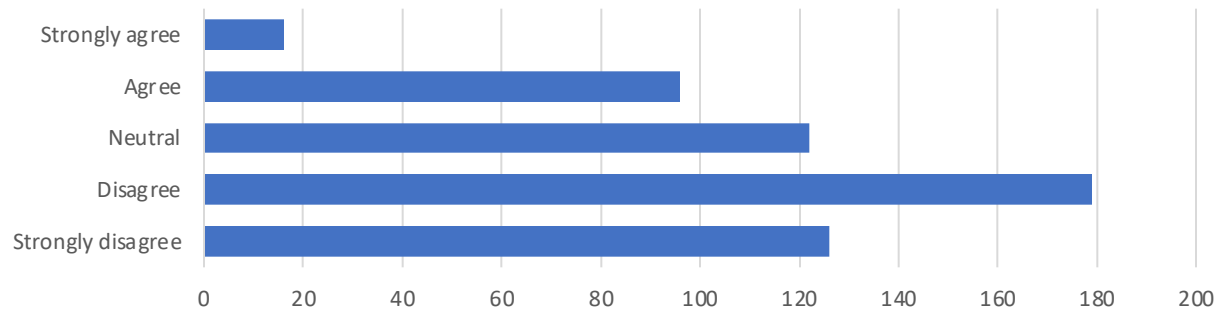
Online Survey

A total of 575 responses were recorded. Of those, 393 completed all the questions and 182 answered some of the questions. Thus, the total number of answers varied per question. Of the 575 participants, 50 percent were individuals that work directly with children and families, 35 percent support others that work directly with children and families, seven percent work for a state agency, four percent work with partner organizations (advocacy, business, philanthropy, health, etc.), and four percent from another category. When asked if they had been involved with decision-making when the state creates policies, 56 percent strongly disagreed or disagreed; 23 percent felt neutral; and 21 percent agreed or strongly agreed.

SURVEY RESPONDENTS ROLE



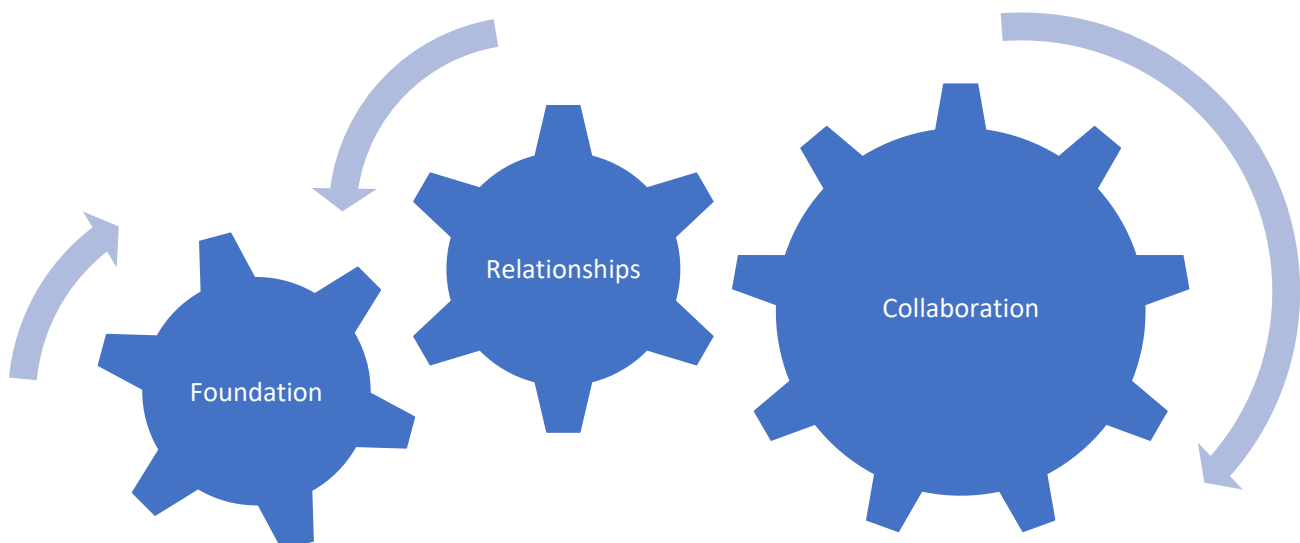
I HAVE BEEN INVOLVED WITH DECISION-MAKING IN THE PAST



Focus group participants often expressed a lack of trust in prior efforts to engage stakeholders in the decision-making process. Prior to the creation of the Office of Childhood, a lack of reciprocal relationships with stakeholders existed creating a barrier between state officials and those providing services directly for children and families. Throughout focus group responses, as well as responses recorded in the online survey, respondents shared the desire to be heard and know their input is valued. This was particularly important for groups that perceive themselves to have been excluded from these conversations in the past. However, with the Office of Childhood's **new effort to engage stakeholders**, participants shared their **hope** for future successful practices.

Historically, Missouri stakeholder engagement efforts have focused on information sharing and collecting feedback,

but to ensure buy-in and successful implementation, a collaborative model is necessary. Stakeholder engagement and collaboration are essential to the development and implementation of effective policies and procedures. It is necessary to create a framework for moving beyond simply informing stakeholders to collaborating with them for shared goals and better outcomes. For authentic, culturally relevant stakeholder engagement to exist, a **foundation** of leadership, values, processes, and resources that nurture collaboration must be created. This foundation requires **relationships** to sustain stakeholders and policymakers in their shared decision-making. The [Zero to Three Hand in Hand Community Framework for Early Childhood Collaboration](#) can be used to guide the collaborative process needed for stakeholder engagement.



EARLY CHILDHOOD AND AFTERSCHOOL STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PRIORITIES AND KEY ACTIONS

Over the course of the Steering Committee meetings, focus groups, and the online survey, **five priorities** and **15 key actions** emerged which can play a critical role in shaping stakeholder engagement for the Office of Childhood. These are:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 01. Active Communication and Relationship Building | 04. Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity of Engagement |
| 02. Collaborate on Decision-Making | 05. Continuous and Consistent Communication of Decisions and Outcomes (Closing the Loop) |
| 03. Family Voice, Engagement, and Leadership | |

PRIORITIES AND KEY ACTIONS	
Active Communication and Relationship Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 01. Partner with community-based organizations and regional groups to expand reach to smaller communities and rural areas, and to build on existing relationships. 02. Create multi-directional avenues of communication to receive input and inform stakeholders. 03. Ensure staff interacting with stakeholders are knowledgeable of different services to provide timely, accurate information to questions.
Collaborate on Decision-Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 04. Create an Advisory Council, co-sponsored by the state and multiple partner organizations, with a defined system for maintaining diverse membership and representation of programs across the early childhood and afterschool system. Existing boards and commissions related to early childhood should be consolidated to reflect the creation of the Office of Childhood and to avoid duplication of effort. 05. Use existing infrastructures (i.e., Regional Hubs) and create broader opportunities to support engagement in committees and work groups at the local level for informing state policies. 06. Ensure those interested in informing policy and decisions are aware of the opportunities to participate.
Family Voice, Engagement, and Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 07. Develop a framework for family engagement to create consistent practices across all agencies and organizations that work with families. 08. Leverage local community organizations already engaging families and offer incentives to encourage participation. 09. Create local family engagement coalitions and train professionals and families on family leadership and appropriate, culturally relevant engagement strategies.

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Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity of Engagement

- 10. Collect, analyze, and use data to determine appropriate strategies and best practices for equitable stakeholder engagement.
- 11. Provide professionals and family members opportunities to participate by offering a variety of methods for engagement (monitoring, messaging, advocating, consulting, collaborating, innovating).
- 12. Gather and use input from diverse voices about needs, possible solutions, how to improve programming, and make services easier to access.

Continuous and Consistent Communication of Decisions and Outcomes (Closing the Loop)

- 13. Intentionally look for opportunities to share relevant information and action ideas with other local groups and organizations to promote aligned efforts.
- 14. Manage expectations by being transparent on the intent of the input requested.
- 15. Create a stakeholder engagement and communication plan outlining the frequency, methods, and processes to share outcomes from the engagement process.

ACTIVE COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING

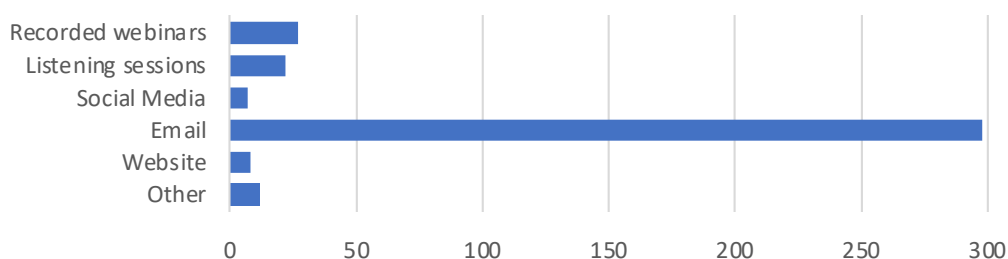
Focus group participants shared a desire to maintain active communication with the Office of Childhood. Providing opportunities to receive updates on policies and services as well as being able to provide feedback in the decision-making process was important to stakeholders. Stakeholders asked for a consistent point of contact with knowledge of programs to answer questions and provide information.

Survey participants were also asked about ways to be kept informed of changes. The majority selected emails, followed by recorded webinars and listening sessions; however, many expressed having more than one way of keeping individuals informed was necessary. When asked about communicating directly with the Office of Childhood through phone or email, most requested consistent, timely, accurate, transparent, respectful, and concise communication. With previous agencies, many expressed frustrations

with not knowing who to contact, receiving automated emails, automated voice recordings, or no responses at all. Responsive communication with a resourceful, informed person to answer emails and phone calls was requested most throughout the stakeholder engagement process. Stakeholders would like communication about new policies and information that is consistent and easy for professionals and families to understand.

“COMMUNICATION HAS BEEN PRIMARILY TOP-DOWN; ENGAGEMENT HAS MAINLY BEEN JUST SHARING INFORMATION. THE OFFICE SHOULD TRANSITION TO MORE BIDIRECTIONAL FLOW OF INFORMATION, LESS TOP DOWN AND MORE COLLABORATION AND TRUE PARTNERSHIP.”

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE CONTACTED AND KEPT INFORMED OF CHANGES?



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Other strategies proposed by participants for sharing information included employing a user-friendly website, sharing informational memos, and using local community service providers (i.e., WIC and SNAP) to share information. In addition, social media, such as Facebook groups for Regional Hubs, as well as a statewide messaging system to receive information through an App or by text message was recommended. Participants also requested continuation of the monthly Preschool Development Grant webinars and appreciated the consistency of the information shared.

ACTIVE COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

- 01.** *Partner with community-based organizations and regional groups to expand reach to smaller communities and rural areas and to build on existing relationships.*
- 02.** *Create multi-directional avenues of communication to receive input and inform stakeholders.*
- 03.** *Ensure staff interacting with stakeholders is knowledgeable of different services to provide timely, accurate information to questions.*



COLLABORATE ON DECISION-MAKING

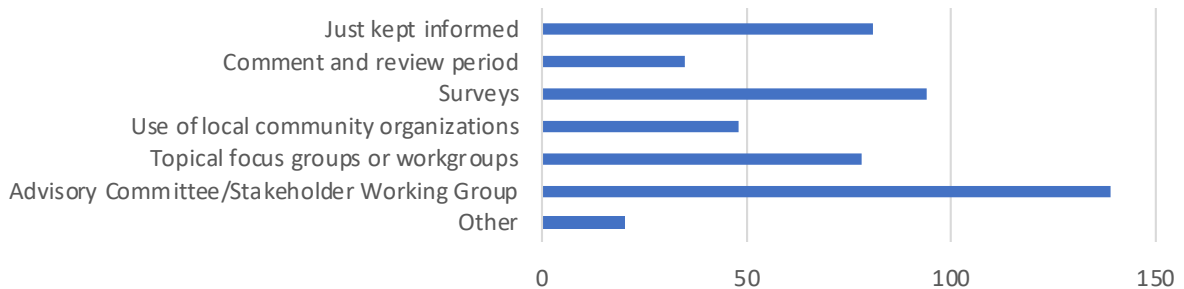
When asked about ways in which participants could be involved in the decision-making process at the state level, most wanted to participate through surveys, focus groups, webinars, online meetings, and advisory committees, as well as listening sessions and town halls. Addressing their contextual constraints regarding time and location are important for stakeholders to be engaged, and many participants and survey respondents suggested providing incentives to help navigate barriers in engagement.

In open-ended comments, respondents expressed the need to advocate within the new Office of Childhood, in their local communities, and to legislators about topics relevant to their expertise in an organized way. Others expressed the need to be more involved in the policy process both within the Office and in the legislature by holding working groups to discuss potential policies, the repercussions at all levels, and avenues to promote them. Overall, the general responses stressed the need to have their voices heard through different forms of engagement.

In the survey, participants from different professions expressed a desire to join specialized advisory councils or work groups to discuss policies and provide input. Answers reflected that while some respondents were aware of the existence of groups that cater to specific issues of early childhood and afterschool, many had no knowledge of them or lacked access. A comprehensive list of all the current councils and workgroups with opportunities to participate would allow interested individuals to be involved in the issues that are specific to their profession. It was also suggested to use existing regional committees or the Regional Hubs to encourage participation in decision-making.

“ALLOW US TO HELP TROUBLESHOOT. WE HAVE A LOT OF EXPERIENCE AND CONNECTIONS WITH PEOPLE TO PROVIDE POTENTIAL FEEDBACK OR KICKBACK FROM THE FIELD.”

HOW CAN THE STATE ENCOURAGE YOUR ENGAGEMENT AS POLICIES ARE DEVELOPED?



COLLABORATE ON DECISION-MAKING

04. Create an Advisory Council, co-sponsored by the state and multiple partner organizations, with a defined system for maintaining diverse membership and representation of programs across the early childhood and afterschool system. Existing boards and commissions related to early childhood should be consolidated to reflect the creation of the Office of Childhood and to avoid duplication of effort.

05. Use existing infrastructures (i.e., Regional Hubs) and create broader opportunities to support engagement in committees and work groups at the local level for informing state policies.

06. Ensure those interested in informing policy and decisions are aware of the opportunities to participate.

Office of Childhood Advisory Council

The Office of Childhood Advisory Council should establish a direct line of communication among state agencies, partner organizations, and the local community to create a tiered approach to stakeholder engagement and information sharing. The Advisory Council should include diverse representation from each of the child and family serving programs in the Office of Childhood, state agencies, and partner organizations. The Advisory Council should develop a shared vision and goals to ensure coordination and alignment across programs while advocating for the needs of young children and their families. This should include re-examining existing advisory functions, boards, and commissions to avoid duplication of effort and streamline administration.

Leadership and Membership

The Office of Childhood Advisory Council should operate under a shared leadership model between the state agency and multiple partnership organizations that promotes the beliefs and activities described herein. Processes for membership should be created, including documentation of ideal membership and using an application process, to ensure diverse representation. Membership should include, at a minimum:

- Parents, family members, caregivers of children receiving Office of Childhood program services
- Early Childhood and Afterschool Professionals
- Higher Education/Professional Preparation Program Representatives
- Regional Hub representation
- Program Administrators, including the Director of the Head Start Collaboration Office
- Partner Organizations
- Representatives from state agencies providing services for young children and their families (i.e., child welfare)

Structure

Meetings should be scheduled at regular intervals (i.e., quarterly) with supported facilitation.

Local Committees

The Regional Hubs can be used to provide local representation and to ensure two-way communication from the Advisory Council back to the local community. Policies and procedures should be created to ensure consistency across the Hubs to promote stakeholder engagement in local communities. For example, Alabama has local Children's Policy Councils to inform the State Advisory Council.

Subcommittees

The Office of Childhood Advisory Council should create standing committees and provide opportunities for Ad Hoc Committees for stakeholders to provide input on policies related to specific program policies or changes in rules or regulations. Examples of committees may include:

- Child Care Licensing Rules and Regulations
- Program Access
- Needs Assessment/Strategic Planning
- Monitoring
- Program Alignment
- Stakeholder Engagement and Communication
- Social Emotional Competence/Early Childhood Mental Health
- Transition

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FAMILY ENGAGEMENT CONTINUUM			
Continuum Level	Involvement	Engagement	Leadership
Parent Role	Recipient	Consultant/Partner	Change Agent
Level of Partnership	Participates in services and is given information about available services and ongoing efforts.	Asks for feedback and is involved in discussions about problems in which change strategies should be used. Provides information that is used to make decisions.	Influences decisions and takes part in implementing actions, collecting, and analyzing data, and strategic planning.

FAMILY VOICE, ENGAGEMENT, AND LEADERSHIP

The inability to break down barriers between state officials and families and caregivers has led to the exclusion of family voices in the decision-making process. Even during the stakeholder engagement process for this report, the strategies designed and used did not allow for family engagement. Utilizing community-based organizations with established relationships would provide greater opportunity for ensuring family voice is heard when developing policies. Further, participants shared the need to ensure all families and caregivers are involved in this process by extending invitations to mothers, fathers, grandparents, and others that care for children.

When asked how the state and local communities can ensure families and professionals are engaged, survey respondents proposed surveys, listening sessions, in-person events, social media, and emails. Many focus group participants suggested partnering with local community-based family serving organizations to reach families and caregivers due to the established trust. In addition, to promote ongoing engagement with families, respondents believe families need to feel validated and their contribution matters to be, and stay, engaged. ***“Make it a priority.”***

Family engagement occurs along a continuum from just involvement to leadership. Developing a family engagement framework to create consistent practices across all agencies, organizations, and programs providing services for families and their children can support authentic, culturally relevant engagement of families and caregivers. Many states have engaged statewide coalitions to create state frameworks and action plans, often modeled after the Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework as well as the Framework for Early Childhood Systems.

For families and caregivers to participate and engage in focus groups and listening sessions, the topic needs to be specific and tailored, in small group settings, in a place that is known and comfortable for families. Parent Cafes with trained facilitators that are parents or caregivers, are often used for focus groups or listening sessions. In each of the focus groups and throughout the online survey responses, providing incentives such as gift cards, formula or diaper coupons, or other resources were recommended to promote family engagement.

“FAMILIES ARE BUSIER THAN EVER. MAKE IT EASY FOR THEM TO BE ENGAGED. IN THE AGE OF TECHNOLOGY THERE IS NO REASON NOT TO USE IT TO COLLECT AS MANY VOICES AS POSSIBLE BEFORE CREATING POLICY. BE CREATIVE AND OFFER MANY WAYS OF ENGAGEMENT. THEN LET PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT IT.”

FAMILY VOICE, ENGAGEMENT, AND LEADERSHIP

07. Develop a framework for family engagement to create consistent practices across all agencies and organizations that work with families.
08. Leverage local community organizations already engaging families and offer incentives to encourage participation.
09. Create local family engagement coalitions and train professionals and families on family leadership and appropriate, culturally relevant engagement strategies.

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Four Key Areas to Effectively and Authentically Engage Families

- 01.** Build a culture of respect, inclusion, and equity to help shape the work with families. Lift up racial equity as the first step in creating an organizational environment and culture that respects all families.
- 02.** Coach parents, families, and caregivers on their competence and confidence in their roles, working with them instead of simply imparting information, and communicating and interacting with them in ways that build their confidence in their ability to address challenges themselves.
- 03.** Listen to and collaborate with parents, families, and caregivers on how to design programs and communicate how you will engage them in the leadership of the organization itself.
- 04.** Work with other organizations and communities to benefit parents, families, and caregivers by not only helping parents navigate the system but also coordinating and collaborating with other organizations and government agencies to streamline programs and services and maximize resources for families.

DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND EQUITY IN ENGAGEMENT

Professionals and families are the most impacted by new policies, thus, their voice is key in the decision-making process. However, in the past, their input has not been requested or incorporated into new policies and practices. Focus group and survey participants discussed the need to prioritize professional and family input as it accurately portrays the reality of the profession and the direct impact of policies. Similarly, participants shared the complex responsibilities early childhood professionals have that limit their ability to engage in the process as well as their exhaustion from multiple obligations. Creating a variety of engagement opportunities using different methods for stakeholders to provide input would accommodate for professional and family schedules. Further, the Office of Childhood should continue to **develop a deeper understanding of the realities and the direct impact of policies** on professionals and families.

A holistic approach was discussed within the focus groups and the survey participants. Individuals in the focus groups expressed the need to create opportunities for professionals that work with children in different fields to provide input. Home visitors expressed their continuous efforts to engage with mental health consultants, social workers, pediatricians, therapists, and other professionals who work directly with children.

Professionals, families, caregivers, and others providing services for children and families come from and work with diverse groups of people. One decision can have different repercussions depending on these different groups; therefore, focus group participants and survey respondents shared the importance of ensuring all their voices are

represented in the engagement process. Heard throughout the process, stakeholders just want the opportunity to participate and engage.

Rural communities; economically, racially, and socially marginalized groups; as well as tribal communities were not typically intentionally or authentically engaged by previous offices, according to the focus group responses. When sharing invitations to engage, it is necessary to connect with diverse stakeholders from a variety of communities and experiences. For example, those living in rural communities, as well as fathers, were routinely mentioned as a priority group the Office of Childhood should seek to engage.

To ensure diverse representation in stakeholder engagement, the Office of Childhood should engage in a stakeholder **mapping** process, informed by the overall vision prioritizing those experiencing the most inequities, to understand who the key stakeholders are.

“ JUST INVITE US. WE JUST NEED AN INVITATION TO THE TABLE.”

DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND EQUITY OF ENGAGEMENT

- 10.** Collect, analyze, and use data to determine appropriate strategies and best practices for equitable stakeholder engagement.
- 11.** Provide professionals and family members opportunities to participate by offering a variety of methods for engagement (monitoring, messaging, advocating, consulting, collaborating, innovating).
- 12.** Gather and use input from diverse voices about needs, possible solutions, how to improve programming, and make services easier to access.

CONTINUOUS AND CONSISTENT COMMUNICATION OF DECISIONS AND OUTCOMES (CLOSING THE LOOP)

Focus groups respondents expressed a desire to be informed on the impact of their feedback in the decision-making process and in implementation. Respondents shared frustrations from past engagement efforts with previous child and family serving agencies as their input was not incorporated in new policies and practices, nor did they know why the decision was made, considering the process a waste of time. Many stated they understand their feedback cannot always be incorporated into new policies or in decisions but want to be informed of the final decision and why it was made.

Managing expectations by sharing the purpose of the engagement as well as the ability of The Office of Childhood to utilize it to inform decisions is necessary to maintain respectful relationships with stakeholders. In addition, a critical aspect of stakeholder engagement is to make sure decisions are relayed back to stakeholders, “closing the loop,” which is often the most difficult step. Keeping participants informed shows their contributions are heard and valued, which plays a vital role in building trust while motivating stakeholders to participate in future processes. Communicating results is just as important as collecting input.

A **stakeholder engagement and communication plan** provides stakeholders clear guidance on the engagement process and avoids future misunderstandings about their participation. The plan must include the frequency in which stakeholders will receive updates and the methods (e.g., email, webinars, etc.) that will be used. Similarly, professionals should be made aware of the different steps in the process during which they will receive information. Some engagement processes have different stages that need to be completed before implementation or outcomes are finalized; the reporting points should be specified within the plan.

CONTINUOUS AND CONSISTENT COMMUNICATION OF DECISIONS AND OUTCOMES (CLOSING THE LOOP)

- 13.** *Intentionally look for opportunities to share relevant information and action ideas with other local groups and organizations to promote aligned efforts.*
- 14.** *Manage expectations by being transparent on the intent of the input requested.*
- 15.** *Create a stakeholder engagement and communication plan outlining the frequency, methods, and processes to share decisions and outcomes from the engagement process.*



MISSOURI EARLY CHILDHOOD AND AFTERSCHOOL STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Based on the feedback from the Steering Committee, focus group participants, and respondents to the online survey, the **Missouri Early Childhood and Afterschool Stakeholder Engagement Steering Committee** developed **Core Values for Stakeholder Engagement** as well as a recommended **Stakeholder Engagement Process**. The process should be systematic, logical, and practical, progressing from planning and identifying a vision through monitoring, evaluation, and communication. The process is represented as a circle because it is constant and follows a cycle of continuous quality improvement. It is iterative in which the Office of Childhood will improve its ability to perform meaningful stakeholder engagement while developing relationships grounded in mutual respect.

Core Values For Stakeholder Engagement

01. Policymakers enter the process with a genuine desire to balance and incorporate the needs of stakeholders into programmatic decisions with the goal of continuous quality improvement.
02. Those affected by a decision, the stakeholders, have a right to be involved in the decision-making process and their contribution influences the decision.
03. Engagement seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
04. Engagement promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all stakeholders, including policymakers.
05. Stakeholders provide input in designing how they participate and are provided the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
06. Policymakers and stakeholders seek first to understand, then to be understood.
07. Policymakers recognize the stakeholders are diverse and will offer a fair chance for all stakeholder groups and individuals to participate that is culturally and linguistically relevant.
08. Stakeholder engagement practices must elevate underrepresented voices to create the robust engagement required of equity-centered programs and policies.
09. Decisions are made by consensus where stakeholders support a decision, even if it is not the first choice of some.
10. Stakeholders are engaged in the implementation process and informed of outcomes from new decisions.



RECOMMENDED STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

The recommended stakeholder engagement process outlines eight steps for stakeholder engagement along with suggested activities for implementation. [Adapted from the Five-Step Approach to Stakeholder Engagement.](#)

01. Engagement Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a vision and goals for future engagement and define success. Setting a vision will help clarify the goals of the engagement. Focus on where stakeholder engagement can have the biggest impact on the strategic plan. Understand and manage stakeholder expectations. Define what successful stakeholder engagement looks like. Acknowledge and address any challenges early in the process.
02. Stakeholder Mapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define criteria for identifying and prioritizing stakeholders. List relevant groups, organizations, and people, and identify their focus areas. Identify internal and external sources who may have important perspectives on the issues and consult these sources for input and participation in mapping stakeholders. Stakeholder mapping is a collaborative process allowing identification of relevant perspectives to ensure participation of diverse groups to address the issues and goals of the strategic plan. The process of selecting participants should be transparent.
03. Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define and select impactful stakeholder engagement strategies based on the stakeholder group and goals of the engagement. The format of the engagement should match the issue, stakeholders, and situation. Stakeholder engagement strategies include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informational websites State-led advisory committees Press-releases, news, and social media Online surveys Online guidance, training materials and FAQ documents Regional forums Webinars or in-person presentations Online videos or e-newsletters Focus groups Listening tours Workgroups to develop draft recommendations for policies

EARLY CHILDHOOD & AFTERSCHOOL STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Final Report and Recommendations

03. Preparation (Cont.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure facilitators of the engagement process are trained in cultural competency and are committed to race equity and parent leadership. Ensure stakeholders are knowledgeable of their role and the expectations of their participation in the engagement process. Engagement approaches are culturally sensitive and accessible to all participants considering context, location, format, and language. Inclusive engagement reaches particularly vulnerable groups or those less likely to engage. Determine resources (expertise, people, and budget) needed to support the engagement strategy and follow-up activities. Determine logistics for the engagement ensuring accessibility for those in rural communities, with limited technology, or diverse linguistic requirements. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement should be timely to ensure the perspectives of stakeholders can inform the outcome of the decisions that may affect them. Create evaluation criteria and measures for success. Develop a feedback plan and mechanism.
04. Stakeholder Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct the engagement ensuring equitable stakeholder contributions evaluating the process ensuring continuous quality improvement to the process. Provide staff with sufficient time, flexibility, and skills training to build relationships with and be responsive to stakeholders in their roles as partners and leaders. Invite stakeholders to share their expectations for the engagement. Allow for equal contributions encouraging less-vocal stakeholders to participate in the conversation. Document the engagement, including the original purpose and goals of the engagement; methods used; participants; a summary of the feedback and discussions; and a list of decisions, actions, and recommendations.
05. Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify opportunities from the feedback for potential decision-making incorporating diversity in voices to highlight the experiences of all populations. Review lessons from the engagement to plan the next engagement. Review stakeholder voices that were included in the engagement process to determine if new groups should be represented in future processes.
06. Action Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make decisions with stakeholder input.
07. Communicate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a communication plan outlining the frequency, channels, and processes to share decisions from the engagement process. Share decisions made from the engagement to ensure stakeholders feel valued - to close the loop. For each decision, prepare a response with a rationale behind the decision or next step. Utilize accessible language when communicating to stakeholders by being clear, concise, direct, and easy to understand.
08. Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outcomes from implementation processes should be transparent. Engagement notes, actions, and outcomes should be shared with participants, if possible. If not, summary outcomes should be disclosed.



IMPLEMENTING THE PRIORITIES AND KEY ACTIONS

To implement the recommended priorities and key actions, the Office of Childhood should create a **schedule, timeline, and plan** beginning with **establishing a culture** that values stakeholder engagement. Practices, including training and accountability, should be embedded within the Office of Childhood's policies creating a mindset and structure to develop and sustain stakeholder engagement. Becoming an organization that skillfully engages stakeholders in all levels of programming and decision-making takes preparation, resources, and a shift in culture.

Training and Accountability

Training for those conducting and participating in stakeholder engagement will be necessary to implement the recommended stakeholder engagement process. Those engaging stakeholders within the Office of Childhood must have skills to facilitate engagement as well as to understand the purpose and goals of the engagement. Training on effective engagement strategies and culturally responsive practices shifts the Office of Childhood's role to minimize intimidation and discomfort from dominant cultures to generate a space of co-creation of knowledge valuing participants' social and cultural perspectives. Building organizational capacity can be achieved through empowering staff and families and through efficient and formalized processes and procedures that clarify roles.

By engaging with families as experts on and partners in their children's healthy development, systems become more responsive to the needs of families, and families are more likely to get the services and support they need to thrive. To be engaged effectively, parents, families, and caregivers must be enabled to become partners with agencies and leaders and be supported to increase communication and collaborative decision-making skills. To facilitate this level of engagement, the Office should:

- Create a leadership pathway for families to learn, grow, and practice leadership and advocacy skills.
- Create a continuing stream of opportunities for families to develop their leadership such as workshops, parent cafes, and formal leadership training as well as opportunities to co-create and lead programs. The most valuable components of parent leadership training are:
 - Coaching and support from skilled staff, mentors, and other parents in the group.
 - Access to leaders and decision-makers in their community and state.
 - Knowledge of how government works and how to make it work for their children.
- Provide staff professional development opportunities to strengthen cultural and relationship-based competencies to support parents, families, and caregivers.

CREATING A CULTURE OF STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

- Stakeholder engagement is embedded and supported by the culture of the Office of Childhood.
- Staff understand the motivation for conducting stakeholder engagement.
- Leadership demonstrates a commitment to stakeholder engagement.
- Relationships and trust are the central focus of stakeholder engagement.
- Training is provided for staff to support and promote meaningful stakeholder engagement.
- Stakeholder engagement is an iterative process where lessons learned improve the process.

RESOURCES

Stakeholder Engagement

[ABLE Change Identifying Relevant Perspectives](#)
[ABLE Change Agent Practices: tools and resources for community systems change](#)
[Education Commission of the States Collaborative Stakeholder Engagement](#)
[Benefits of Communicating and Engaging with Stakeholders](#)

Equity

[Manifesto for Race Equity & Parent Leadership in Early Childhood Systems](#)
[Advancing Equity-Driven Family Engagement for Systems Change in Early Childhood](#)
[Equity Starts Early: Addressing Racial Inequities in Child Care and Early Education Policy](#)

Collaboration

[Zero to Three Hand in Hand Community Framework for Early Childhood Collaboration](#)

Family Engagement

[Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework](#)
[Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework for Early Childhood Systems](#)
[Maryland Family Engagement Framework and Toolkit](#)
[North Carolina Early Childhood Family Engagement and Leadership Framework](#)
[Creating a Culture of Collaborative Family Engagement](#)
[Advancing Equity-Driven Family Engagement for Systems Change in Early Childhood](#)
[Ripples of Transformation: Families Leading Change in Early Childhood Systems](#)
[Relationship-Based Competencies to Support Family Engagement](#)